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**CITY OF SAN PABLO**  
*City of New Directions*

## San Pablo Avenue Complete Streets Study

### Summary Description of Nomination

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The City of San Pablo is pleased to submit our application to the ABAG *Growing Smarter Together* Awards Program, under the *On the Ground – Getting It Done Award: FOCUSed Growth* category. The San Pablo Avenue Complete Streets Study was funded by a Caltrans Environmental Justice Planning Grant and showcases a true collaboration between many dedicated groups, including the City of San Pablo, City of Richmond, Contra Costa Health Services, First 5 Contra Costa and the West County Regional Group, Fehr & Peers, Local Government Commission, and more.

The project furthers the City's vision, as set forth in the San Pablo General Plan 2030 and San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan, to create a "complete street" along a portion of San Pablo Avenue falling within the San Pablo Avenue Priority Development Area. Relying heavily on community input, the project will improve access and safety along the corridor for pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles.



Pedestrians on side of San Pablo Avenue in foreground and walking on paved median in background.

### Contact Information

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## Description of Project

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### Project Background

San Pablo Avenue, known locally as “the Avenue,” is a regional thoroughfare that extends through the City of San Pablo and much of the East Bay. The character of the Avenue, quality of its environment, and the role that it plays vary from one community to another. Between the cities of El Cerrito and Crockett, the Avenue is an ABAG-designated Priority Development Area (PDA). In the City of San



“Goat tracks” along the sparsely vegetated roadway embankments without sidewalks tell part of the story – people do walk here for local trips.

Pablo, the Avenue is the City’s primary arterial. It is home to the City’s major public facilities and community destinations. Most importantly, the Avenue is the primary route for the majority of transit lines that pass through the city. It serves as the main connection for local trips between northern San Pablo residential neighborhoods, central San Pablo, Hilltop Mall, Contra Costa College, Wanlass Park, and other important destinations. However, the corridor lacks designated facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists, creating a challenging and dangerous environment for walking, bicycling, and transit use. Despite these conditions, people walk and bike the corridor every day.

The study segment of San Pablo Avenue between Rivers Street and Hilltop Drive marks the northern end of San Pablo’s urban core, as it transitions into a more suburban context. Most of the study area is within the City of Richmond’s jurisdiction. Contra Costa College and Hilltop Mall are located just east of the Avenue, within the City of San Pablo and City of Richmond, respectively. These two land uses are the largest destinations in the study area and attract regional users. All other streets within the study area serve residential neighborhoods, local schools, and neighborhood parks. Bayview Elementary School, Highland Elementary School, and Helms Middle School are all within 1.5 miles of the study area.

High vehicular speed and the lack of traffic calming features create dangerous conditions for travelers along this section of San Pablo Avenue. Between 2001 and 2009, 116 accidents occurred within one quarter mile of the study area, with 49 of these as injury-accidents. Fifteen pedestrians and nine bicyclists were injured and two pedestrians were killed. Residents of LeRoy Heights, a neighborhood within the study area, tell and retell the story of a woman and her young child who were killed on the corridor several years ago. This exemplifies the way the corridor’s safety has strongly impacted the community.

Historically, San Pablo Avenue has been dominated by automobile traffic and auto-serving industries, and continues to do little to encourage sustainable and healthy practices in the community. Additionally, because of its prominence within San Pablo and Richmond, the Avenue plays an important role in shaping the perception of these cities and the region. Improving safety and accessibility will redefine this corridor as a major local and regional connector for residents, workers, students, and visitors.

In February 2012, the City of San Pablo was awarded a Caltrans Environmental Justice Planning Grant to conduct the San Pablo Avenue Complete Streets Study. The project focused on improving multimodal access, safety, and connections along the San Pablo corridor by identifying needs and prioritizing improvements to facilitate pedestrian, bicycle, and transit trips. At the heart of this process was a robust public outreach effort that brought together residents, business owners, partner agencies, and other key stakeholders to ensure that the final plan recommendations were both relevant to, and supported by, the local community. To accommodate the nature of the San Pablo population, all workshops and project materials were available in both Spanish and English.



Neighbors, business owners, and stakeholders engaging in a charrette during Community Workshop #1.

Proposed design strategies and improvements were highly community-driven, with community residents participating fully in the decision-making process. During the initial phase of the project, residents and stakeholders walked the corridor with the project team and participated in a community workshop to identify needs and challenges and develop potential solutions. The project team then translated the input into conceptual alternatives easily understood by the public and presented them to the community in a second workshop for consideration and discussion. At the third and final community workshop



Workshop participants walking the corridor.

participants responded to refined alternatives and design details leading to a final preferred plan for the corridor. Outside of the traditional workshops, extensive, non-traditional outreach efforts were conducted to inform and empower the local community. One such effort included built environment trainings, where the project team presented “complete streets” concepts to resident groups and taught them basic advocacy skills for making improvements in their neighborhoods. Additional efforts included “flying” at community centers and local schools, and canvassing the neighborhoods and corridor.

In April 2011, the City of San Pablo completed its General Plan. The policies outlined in the plan are structured around four key initiatives. One of these initiatives calls for San Pablo to create a pedestrian and bicycle-friendly community, enhancing pedestrian and bicycle access to local attractions, including parks, schools, and retail. Additionally, the General Plan includes a National American Planning Association award-winning Health Element, which sets forth policies designed to improve the built environment and social conditions to improve health.

In the Health Element, two Guiding Policies, and an associated Implementing Policy, specifically address multimodal transportation:

*HEA-G-1: Ensure that all San Pablo residents have access to a variety of transportation and physical activity options that enhance health and that work for diverse lifestyles, incomes, and abilities.*

*HEA-G-2: Achieve more walkable, livable neighborhoods by expanding the multimodal transportation system and creating a safe, pedestrian-oriented environment.*

*HEA-I-1: Implement street design features that facilitate walking and biking in both new and established areas. Require a minimum standard of these features for all new developments.*

The project also actualizes the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan, the City of Richmond's General Plan and Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan, and WCCTAC's Action Plan Update and Transit Access Plan, by providing visions and policies for how San Pablo Avenue can become a vibrant, accessible, and sustainable mixed-use corridor for users of all kinds.

## **FOCUS Goals**

The portion of San Pablo Avenue between Rivers and Hilltop Drive, encompassing the study area, is located within the San Pablo Avenue Priority Development Area (PDA), which, in its entirety, spans between El Cerrito and Crockett for a total of sixteen miles. The San Pablo Avenue Complete Streets Study showcases the extent to which jurisdictions can work together to successfully implement both Specific and General Plans highlighting transit-oriented locations. The work accounts for the needs, desires, and goals of the local communities, as well as those of FOCUS, to transform this unsafe, underutilized corridor into one that actively encourages accessible and safe multi-modal use.

## **Significance to the Community and Region**

Improving multimodal access and connections along the San Pablo Avenue corridor is a key objective of multiple plans adopted by the City of San Pablo and City of Richmond. The San Pablo Avenue Complete Streets Study accomplished this objective by identifying the needs and prioritizing improvements to facilitate pedestrian, bicycle, and motorized transit access and improve safety for all users.

Interstate 80 runs parallel to San Pablo Avenue, approximately one mile east of the study area. San Pablo Avenue, a route of regional significance, is often used as a local alternate route to I-80, and the routes are parallel from the City of Richmond to the south through the City of Hercules to the north.

Pedestrians and bicyclists traveling along San Pablo Avenue face significant challenges. The posted speed limit along San Pablo Avenue changes progressively from 50 mph at Hilltop Drive to 35 mph at Rivers Street. Vehicles are traveling at a high velocity southbound on a downward slope. Pedestrian and bicycle facilities such as sidewalks and bike lanes are lacking, and marked crossings are few. Only two intersections are signalized with marked crosswalks across San Pablo Avenue, but are over one mile in



distance from one another. These attributes create a challenging environment for walking and bicycling, which in turn affects public transit access and ridership. As a result, the corridor functions as a high-speed arterial for vehicles, rather than a key multimodal regional connector. Despite these existing conditions, San Pablo residents do walk along the median and bicycle along this roadway. Future changes to surrounding land uses, particularly in the Hilltop area, will likely increase demand for walking and bicycling facilities along the Avenue.



High speed limit and lack of traffic calming features.

## Conclusion

The San Pablo Avenue Complete Streets Study is a vital project actualizing the goals of the local community, as well as those of the greater Contra Costa county region. Transforming San Pablo Avenue into a safer, more walkable and bikeable corridor, while maintaining its role as a “release valve” during incidences on Interstate 80, the project showcases an ambitious effort to create a “complete community.” The project fulfills the goals of multiple plans, as well as the goals in the FOCUS Initiative. The project focuses on the health, sustainability, and accessibility of the Avenue and its ensemble of users, and looks to smart growth principles and improvement of overall community health when planning for its future. Highlighting the achievements of this work, the project was recently awarded a One Bay Area Grant (OBAG) award to fund 100% design and construction, slated for spring of 2014.

## Letters of Recommendation

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Please see attached Letters of Recommendation from East Bay Bicycle Coalition (EBBC), First 5 Contra Costa – West County Regional Working Group, and West Contra Costa Transportation Advisory Committee (WCCTAC).

## Supplemental Materials

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Please see the following attached Supplemental Materials:

- San Pablo Avenue Complete Streets Study Fact Sheet
- San Pablo Avenue Complete Streets Study Area Map
- Pedestrian and Bicycle Collisions in Study Area, 2000-2010
- Community Workshop #1 Event Flyer
- Concept Plan Development, following Community Workshop #1
- Multimodal Opportunities and Constraints along San Pablo Avenue
- Recommended Concept Plan